

Statement
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I see disability studies as a scholarship dedicated to two principles that also drive the disability rights movement: 1) a recognition of the full complexity of disability in society, and 2) self-determination for people with disabilities. I don't believe you must be a disability rights activist to be a disability studies scholar, but I am both and I appreciate the compatibility and dynamic tension between the two statuses. Moreover, there is still something quite radical about incorporating the social model(s) of disability in research and teaching. In our adherence to complex, interdisciplinary approaches to disability, in our efforts to bring the voices and perspectives of persons with disabilities to the forefront of our work, in our attention to power relations and equality between individuals with and without disabilities, in campaigning for the respectability of disability studies in the academy, we are by necessity activists.

Here are some of my thoughts about where disability studies and SDS should be going:

1) Programs that are called "disability studies" are cropping up across the country, engendering interest from prospective students, university faculty and administrators, the press and the public. SDS must take a strong leadership role in defining the field, its approaches and standards for curriculum. Without the presence of a strong academic/professional society, we who work in the field will remain isolated and unsupported in our efforts to establish disability studies in our institutions. The term itself is in danger of becoming meaningless if, in a standards vacuum, it becomes a marketing tool attached to programs and courses that bear little relation to our values.

2) Although I appreciate the efforts of individual scholars to map out the field and its ideal setting, I want SDS to address the political and economic realities we face daily in the trenches. How do we get university support for disability studies? Which strategies and alliances have worked for others? Which have proved too costly? How do we find funding for nontraditional disability research?

3) If SDS is committed to the advancement of disability scholars and to the legitimization of disability studies as an academic field, we must have a place to submit articles for refereed publication. The reality of the tenure track is that few of us have time and energy to write thoughtful articles and research reports that "don't count" from our university's point of view. This constitutes an unfortunate disincentive for contributing to our society's major periodical. We should have a home at SDS for our scholarship and research reports. On the other hand, we must preserve the inclusive forum that has been available through DSQ for conceptual papers, notes, announcements, debates and input by activists and other non-tenure-seeking contributors.

4) In that vein, we must continue to explore persistently and courageously the relationship between the disability activist/advocate community and the academic community in disability studies. I am one of those hopeless idealists who believes there is marriage potential here. I believe we can pursue excellence and rigor without resorting to the old practices of exclusion and "expert" distancing. In fact, I think anything short of a collaboration will fail everyone. Our work will lose vitality, insight and relevance without meaningful participation and more direction by persons who live with disabilities. Conversely, the disability community deserves the best and most complete knowledge possible regarding disability. Universities and funders need to feel the pressure of a vocal disability constituency that endorses rather than distrusts good disability scholarship. Our work is cut out for us to make that happen. SDS can play a key role here.

5) Discussion at SDS should continue to focus on the parameters of power in disability research and teaching. That scholars with disabilities still encounter myriad unfair barriers should be acknowledged. There is a lot to discuss here. That more people with disabilities should be leaders in disability studies should be uncontested. How can SDS help make that happen? We need to mentor and support the development of more scholars with disabilities. We need to recognize and support the struggles of those who already exist. Awards for excellent work, grant competitions, fellowships and lectureships

that affirmatively recruit or recognize persons with disabilities are possible routes. One thing is certain: in today's university, disability studies will go nowhere if it cannot attract outside funding. It's time for SDS to tackle such dilemmas on behalf of its membership.

6) We need to address more vigorously issues of cultural and disability diversity. What can we do to make SDS a comfortable, attractive organization for scholars, students and advocates from various cultural/ethnic/racial minority communities and under represented disability groups? How can we invite and bear the re-organization that may entail?

7) Beyond the players and their disability status, SDS must participate in a broad and deep discussion of rigor in disability studies. We must address and exchange ideas about both theory and methodology. Instead of polarized discussions around such issues as qualitative v. quantitative methods, experimental research v. field observation, phenomenology v. positivist or "hard science" investigation, etc., we need to examine the strengths, weaknesses, possibilities and pitfalls of all approaches. We should remain mindful of our responsibility to be both thorough and open as we establish this inherently revolutionary scholarship - mindful of our commitment to venture into diverse avenues - lest we betray the core values of the disability community.

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